

ACHIEVING DBE GOALS

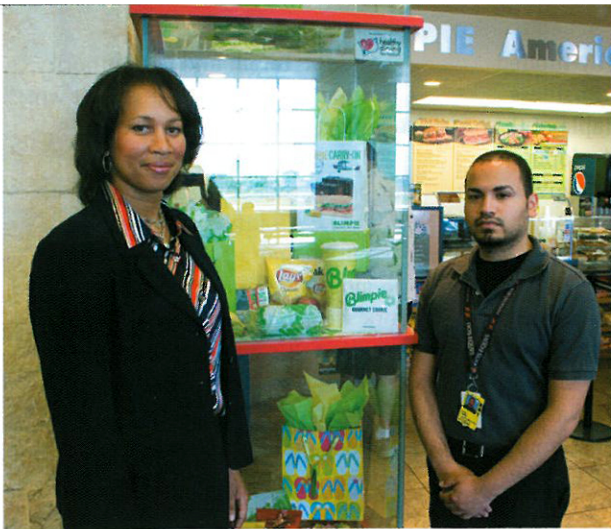
Outreach key in three successful models

BY LOUIS SERINO

San Antonio

San Antonio International Airport operates on a simple platform when it comes to meeting DBE requirements: "The city of San Antonio, the city council, city manager and aviation director are committed to ensuring the most diversity we can get on city contracts."

Led by Lisa Brice, manager and liaison of the DBE program, the



San Antonio's Lisa Brice with Luis Cobio, manager of Blimpie, a program participant.

airport, which sees about 8 million passengers each year, managed to acquire a 20.6 percent participation rate in 2009, eclipsing the FAA goal of 19 percent. To achieve this, Brice and her staff implement a variety of practices that streamline and promote the disadvantaged enterprise certification process.

One such example is the unique points system that San Antonio employs regarding DBE project proposals. It increases participation by encouraging respondents to be detail-oriented in their plans; contractors that have a thoroughly drafted strategy on how they will utilize disadvantaged businesses receive a greater number of points.

Recommendations are then made based on which firm receives the most cumulative points.

The airport practices reciprocity certification—if a small business is a certified disadvantaged business in another state, San Antonio will honor this certification once verified with the proper documentation. This simple

concept allows the small businesses to avoid repeating the intensive steps and provides an incentive for them to bring their work to San Antonio.

"Reciprocity has really made the certification process easy for many of the DBEs. If a business is certified in Louisiana, for example, we don't put them through the same tedious process of filling out another application."

Perhaps the most important aspect of the outreach is illuminating the often complicated certification process. Helping small businesses know what it takes to become certified is a "top priority."

"We also work with other consortiums like the South Central Texas Regional Certification Agency to see how we can get more people in the program and answer their questions." A unified certification procedure, referred to as the Texas Unified Certification Program, was created to facilitate the process for small enterprises.

"We're trying to help them understand that certification is merely a marketing tool. A lot of people get the impression that once they are certified, they have the contract, but it's only the first step. It's a way of getting their foot in the door," Brice said.

The airport also works with prime contractors to involve several small firms that otherwise would not be able to participate. San Antonio's main terminal construction contractor has set up the Contract Control Insurance Program, which allows small contractors to attain performance bonds at the larger contractor rates. This effectively allows the smaller enterprises to partake in larger projects they otherwise would have to pass up.

On other occasions, consultants may carry both payment and performance bonds for small-scale general contractors during each bid cycle. One example is the Acoustical Treatment Project, the airport's noise abatement operation. Here, the larger consultant carried the bond for the much smaller

general contractors, allowing them the resources to do the job.

Another helpful aspect of San Antonio's program is how they provide wage training to their smaller stakeholders.

"We have noticed that smaller, family-owned businesses weren't aware of certain rules and regulations, so we've held training sessions to inform them, in turn helping them avoid some costly penalties," Brice said.

San Antonio's population is more than 60 percent Hispanic, and the

airport holds information forums to reach this large pool of candidates. Monthly outreach sessions filled with presentations inform potential members of the airport expectations and pending projects. And, when a major operation is coming up, more sessions are held.

Such techniques undertaken by Brice and the airport return to the simple platform San Antonio believes in: "Regardless of what minority you are, it should not stop you from participating in any kind of work at San Antonio International Airport." ■

WHAT is ACI-NA DOING?

- The ACI-NA Business Diversity Committee reviews and offers comments on proposed DOT/FAA rules seeking changes to both

streamline the process and increase business opportunities.

- The 2009 chairman on the committee testified before Congress on needed changes in federal laws to encourage DBE certification reciprocity.